

Katy Sellers: Well, we'll get started. Good afternoon. My name is Katy Sellers, and I work for the Texas General Land Office Disaster Recovery Program, and this is Javier Perez, and he is the Project Oversight Manager and he runs all of the construction and engineering that the Disaster Recovery Program does. And Marisa Mason is the Grant Manager, so she makes sure that all of the eligibility requirements to get funding and any contract needs, that is what Marisa helps with. We just wanted to bring you guys together today to let you know about the funding that the state has received and tell you how you can apply for it, what are some uses, and just give you an overview of that. On April 16th, the U.S. Department of Housing awarded the state of Texas \$31 million for wildfire recovery, and it was for any county that was a presidential disaster declaration under the FEMA 4029 Disaster. There were 65 counties across the State of Texas that got that disaster declaration. Cass and Marion County were in that, as were of course Bastrop County and a number of counties all along both the east and west part of Texas. One of the requirements that the Department of Housing gave the state was that 80 percent of the \$30 million had to go to Bastrop County due to the level of devastation in that area. So there is only \$5.9 million available to the remaining counties, and we will be awarding that to cities or counties that apply through a competitive grant process for any infrastructure or economic activities that are eligible under our program. There are a couple of requirements that you must meet. The activity or project that you apply for must be able to tie back to some kind of damage from the wildfires. So you have to show that there was an impact from the fires that took place last year, and that it will benefit the long-term recovery of your community and possibly mitigate fire damage in the future. Like I said, it could be infrastructure activities which could be the repair or the replacement or even the relocation of damaged public facilities, or it could also be economic development activities if you wanted to look at your local economy suffered a loss, your tax base suffered an impact and you wanted to do something like private loans, possibly, job training in the area, improvements to a commercial district that the community might have, or something to get workers back in the area. Those are all type of activities under economic development that would be options. The application process will begin probably around August or September. What we have to do is, the state has put together an action plan with how we intend to spend the money and what the competitive process will be. We're taking comment for 10 days starting yesterday for the next 10 days on that plan, and then once we've received all the comments and prepared responses, we'll be submitting that plan to the U.S. Department of Housing for their approval, and they must approve the state's plan. They have 45 days to approve the plan, which is why we don't anticipate taking applications until August or September because we have to wait for their approval. If we get it earlier than that, it'll be great and we'll start taking applications sooner. We just want to make sure and manage expectations as far as timing goes. When we talk about scoring and what cities and counties can look for in the application, we have a few things that we'll be primarily looking at. 30 points, and this is all in the action plan that's available on our web site, so I can give you that – you don't have to write all this down – but 30 points will go to the per capita damage that your community suffered, or county or city. 30 points will go to the percentage of low to moderate income individuals that could benefit from your projects, and that's something that HUD determines and we can help you with as far as determining the LMI percentage that might be impacted by your projects. Another 20 points will go towards unemployment and the economic health of your county or city. If you've seen a reduction in employment after the fires or like I mentioned, tax base reduction, something like that, that would also factor in. Another 20 points is the recurrence of wildfire damage. If the community has had repeated fires, maybe within the last

couple of years or many times before that, if you can show what the rate every season is of the fires, then that's something else that will be considered as part of the application process. That makes up the 100 points. We also have a tie breaker because many times in this grant process, we end up with communities who score similar, and the tie breaker will be the poverty rate of the census area that the projects are benefiting. HUD-like regulations are intended to benefit the neediest populations and so that's why you'll see a lot of these projects are here to benefit those people who have trouble recovering on their own in communities that are more low income individuals. As I mentioned before, the remaining 65 counties will compete for \$5.9 million, and so in order to split that up, each award will not be less than \$200,000, but it also will not exceed \$1 million. So, sorry to say, you can't get all the money, but any will help hopefully, and that's a wide range and so you may want to do one project or you may have several projects. You can divide that up all the way up to the million dollar cap. And then something else to think about is the eligibility requirements will be more specific. We'll be putting out an application guide once we do get our plan approved by HUD that will give you specific step-by-step on what exactly needs to go into your application. Our application will be available online so you can submit it online and get feedback that way so that we hopefully, it will expedite the process. We've done that with some of our previous grants and it seems to work really well. I think that's really the main overview unless you guys had any other comments to mention?

Javier Perez: I do not. I think the web site for the GLO, where you guys can find the Action Plan is www.glo.texas.gov, and again, the Action Plan is found there, and that will be there for -

Katy Sellers: For however long it takes...

Javier Perez: For however long it takes, and there's a web site also where you guys can submit comments and/or questions.

Katy Sellers: And email is on that link that he mentioned, but the email address is to Gena Hawkins, and her email address is gena.hawkins@glo.texas.gov and so we'll be taking public comment for the next 10 days on the plan, and obviously if we hear from the communities that there's something that we've missed in the state's Action Plan that we feel like there's still an unmet need that this won't address, we'll consider that before we submit the plan to HUD. But otherwise we anticipate submitting the plan to HUD for approval within the next 3 weeks, and so we'll just wait for their approval at that point.

Marisa Mason: I want to make one clarification on eligibility of counties and cities. It actually will be limited to those counties that received a Presidential declaration under FEMA.

Katy Sellers: I can't remember, but it's in the Action Plan, your counties would be a part of that. But like she did mention, it is to the actual units of local government, so if it's a volunteer fire department or just a city group, they would have to get the county or city to apply for the funds in order to receive the funding. I think that's really all we had. We can open up the floor to take ya'll's comments or questions. We'll try to answer them, but anything that we aren't able to answer here, we'll be providing comments to all the questions we get not just here but on our other hearing that we had last night and then through emails, and we'll be posting those online so that you can look at that as you're trying to fill out your application.

Chuck Lucas: Do we need to get up?

Katy Sellers: That would be great, in case there are other communities who might have the same question.

Chuck Lucas: OK, well I'm Chuck Lucas with Cass County, and I'm assuming wildfires were in rural areas. There's not much damage to public infrastructure other than roads, unless you can give me another example, but I can't think of any.

Katy Sellers: Well, roads is, of course if you had some wastewater lines, something like that, that could potentially be another source; fire personnel, anything that the fire department may have suffered some losses because of that. Those are things that you might look at. And then like we mentioned, economic development –

Chuck Lucas: That would be loss of – if a farm got burned up or a ranch?

Katy Sellers: Well, if you could show that there were multiple farms or ranches that suffered damage, therefore creating a lower tax base overall, then you could look at doing some economic development activities like doing private loans for businesses or something like that.

Marisa Mason: Like if for example, even though they are in a rural area, you may have seen your one and only gas station that supplied everybody with their bread and milk when the grocery store was closed. You may have seen that destroyed because it was the only thing out in the middle of the rural area, so that would be economic development.

Chuck Lucas: But a lot of the, or I guess all of the structures or other things were handled by FEMA, right?

Katy Sellers: Right, and so something else to consider is this funding can be used as a match, so FEMA I know will only pay 75 percent, and so we can make up that remaining 25 percent with these funds, or a portion of it.

Chuck Lucas: Because FEMA's been reimbursing some of these places for their cost of fire fighting.

Katy Sellers: Right, and so –

Chuck Lucas: I didn't realize that they're only doing 75 percent?

Katy Sellers: Right, so FEMA will opt on almost everything they do has a cost share, and so if the community can show that they can't make up that cost share, then they can use this funding as a possible way to do that.

Chuck Lucas: OK, thank you.

Katy Sellers: Yeah. Question? OK, great.

Luke Bromley: My name is Luke Bromley. I'm with Jackson Volunteer Fire Department in Jefferson. We have applied for FEMA grant assistance for vehicles, manpower, materials, expenses. Our fire district dodged the bullet, but we were called for assistance on adjacent fire departments, and so a couple of things occurred to me in working with those people is that

economic impact to the timber owners is real severe. The salvage value of timber I understand is about \$3 a ton, where prior to the fires, these people were getting \$21 a ton, and so there's been a real serious impact there. Then with all of the logging companies brought in to Marion County for salvage operations, we did suffer some severe road damage in rural areas that were not accustomed to, and there will be some I guess FEMA consideration there, but Marion County and the economic level and base of our county is such that we don't have nearly the resources that other counties have. In our particular case, our fire department operates with about a \$16,000 a year budget. The funding we receive is \$5,000 from the county. The rest of it is earned by fundraising efforts and donations by generous people in the area. So the impact on the residents in other parts of the county have been severe that we haven't seen in our own area, but this is going to be a big help to them I think.

Katy Sellers: Well we hope so, and thank you, and yes, that's exactly what this is designed for is for the counties and communities to look at the overall impact, and if there are things like significant loss because of the timber or road damages that have happened because of the debris removal that was going on to get all the burned timber out, and erosion control is another thing to think about along the roadways so that in the future you can mitigate fires jumping around is another activity to look at as well. So as we put out the application guide and get closer to the application, Marissa and her team will be working with those communities that are interested in applying and giving a lot of technical assistance to make sure that we find every opportunity to get the funding in any way we can. Both of you have mentioned the FEMA dollars, and so if it turns out you do get additional FEMA money, we'll take that into consideration. We can't duplicate anything that you get from FEMA or SBA or any other group, but we can supplement it potentially. We just have to make sure that we don't duplicate our efforts there as required by the federal government.

Chuck Lucas: Another quick -

Katy Sellers: Yeah, sure.

Chuck Lucas: OK, you mentioned fire reoccurrence, and I did take a cursory look through your action plan, and it had Cass County down there as minimal fires, and it seems like we have fires on an annual basis, so I was just wondering how that was arrived at?

Katy Sellers: Well, and we've gotten the information from the Forest Service, and so if you have other information, that's what we would look for when you submit your applications.

Chuck Lucas: Well, a lot of times, and you probably know that more than me, the volunteer fire departments go out and they fight a lot of brush fires to keep them from getting out of hand, and I don't know if those are reported or how they move up.

Male: Yeah, we have a reporting system with Texas Forest Service so that every incident we respond to is logged in on their database so we can go back at least for a couple of years and give you a pattern of wildfires, emergency response. So medical, vehicle fires, things of that type.

Marisa Mason: Well, and I'd like to clarify that we did get it from the Texas Forest Service and it runs from 2005 to 2011, so each, we've got those years on record, however, in speaking with them, even though the fire departments and volunteer fire departments report to them, sometimes they don't get the whole picture, all of the information.

Chuck Lucas: That's what I was kind of wondering. It seemed awful low.

Marisa Mason: Yeah, that's just what we got strictly from them and they did say that the reports that they get from the fire departments are included in those numbers, however, like Katy said, we're open to additional information from your local fire departments or local governments, if they can prove up that there's more damage annually than what we've seen in the reports from TFS, we're definitely open to that in your application.

Katy Sellers: Basically, we could take any kind of documentation through the local governments as long as it can be proved up, we'll look at anything. We start with FEMA, the Forest Service, and the Department of Agriculture, and those are our tools that are readily available to us, but anything else that the local governments had when they put in their application, we'll look at all of it. So there's lots of ways to –

Chuck Lucas: On my way home tonight, just start a few fires.

Katy Sellers: Now it had to have happened prior to the, it had to be during the declaration period or prior to, to show that – please don't start brush fires on your way home, but no. And we have your information and we'll be sending out emails when we get the approval to let you know that the application's ready to go, and so we'll make sure that you're aware of that at the time and of course our web site has the action plan. We'll have the application. It will have all the information that we have there as well.

Chuck Lucas: Do you want to say the web site one more time?

Katy Sellers: Sure, again, the web site address is www.glo.texas.gov, and when you go onto the web site, there is a disaster recovery tab at the very top, and then on the left hand side once you're on the disaster recovery home page, there's a tab that says wildfires, and that will take you to, it will have a web cast of this hearing and the hearing we had last night; it will have the action plan; it'll have comments that we've received with responses, and then in the future it will have the application guide and the link to the application.

Marisa Mason: And I'm gonna give ya'll cards before you leave, I have my cards with me so that you can contact me with questions about the application, and at the bottom of my card is our web site. So if you have problems with it, it's very clearly at the bottom of this card.

Katy Sellers: All right, well thank you.

Chuck Lucas: Thank you very much.

[End of recording]